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Statement submitted by International Council on Social Welfare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Introduction

Social integration is variously understood. Some view it positively as a process of including all, especially disadvantaged social groups, in the development process; others see it as imposing norms of uniformity in ideals and values and disrespecting socio-cultural diversity. ICSW is committed to promote social integration as adopted in the Copenhagen Declaration at the World Summit for Social Development. The Commitment 4 reads: "We commit ourselves to promote social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons".[1]

Social integration is about including all in sharing wealth through decent work, benefiting from education, health care, enjoying social protection in circumstances beyond their control and participating in decision-making that matters. Economic growth prospects will diminish, poverty eradication will be stymied and social and political stability will be threatened if inequalities and exclusion continue within and between nations.

Social exclusion is a feature of all societies when different rules and policies, formal and informal, enable some and constrain others in gaining access and entitlement to goods, services, activities and resources. Report after global report on progress in poverty eradication, full employment and social integration, over the past few years indicate a dismal trend in inequalities for billions of people the world over.[2]

I. The trends defining social integration

A number of trends defining the context of social integration are well known and without dispute.[3]

In the following sections trends affecting social integration will be reviewed.

1 United Nations. 1995. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action: World Summit for Social Development. New York: United Nations.

2 To name a few: UNDP HDR 2005: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world; World Bank WDR Report 2006: Equity & Development; UNDP 2007: Inclusive Globalization; The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008; World Economic and Social Survey 2008: Overcoming Economic Insecurity; ILO: Global Employment Trends 2008.

3 UNDP HDR 2005: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world; World Bank WDR Report 2006: Equity & Development; UNDP 2007: Inclusive Globalization; The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008; World Economic and Social Survey 2008: Overcoming Economic Insecurity; ILO: Global Employment Trends 2008.

A. Increased population movements

Migrants make up three per cent of the global population[4]. Half of the world's 6.7 billion people are expected to live in urban areas by the end of 2008 for the first time in world history[5].

Ideally, cities offer an enabling environment for people's lives and livelihoods. They can resolve social and environmental problems more effectively than rural areas; cities generate jobs and income. With good governance, cities can deliver education, health care and other services more efficiently than less densely settled areas simply because of their advantages of scale and proximity. But the capacity of urban centres, especially in developing countries, to cater for the basic civic needs of growth is heavily challenged.

The juxtaposition of people who often share neither a common language nor a common religion, or who have very different customs, makes unusual demands on human tolerance and understanding. The arrival of large numbers of "outsiders" also creates unusual strains on existing social services and local economies.

Note must also be taken of irregular migration and human trafficking. Human trafficking, as a form of irregular migration including the buying and selling of humans for the sex industry, is currently one of organised crime's fastest growing businesses.

B. Population Ageing

Older persons risk being socially excluded in many ways. For many, the current financial/economic crisis has reduced, if not stopped, remittances from their urban offspring; the majority of the rural aged have no access to pension benefits because many have not been part of the formal employment sector where there might have been some pension coverage. Moreover, public assistance benefits and related services that would be the last resort for many of the rural aged have shrunk or are unavailable. The situation of older persons is compounded by (a) the erosion of the traditional family and community support systems, (b) increased rural-to-urban migration, (c) increasing proportions of educated older persons with high expectations and (d) greater pressure on social budgets to provide good quality health and other social services as well as income support for the older populations.

C. Women in development

Gender equality and the empowerment of women have been given increasing attention over the past few decades.

Yet many obstacles remain, blocking a fuller social integration for women because of legal and customary barriers, including family and labour laws and deep-rooted socio-cultural perceptions and

4 All data from "Global estimates" are from the United Nations' Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision, http://esa.un.org/migration, unless noted otherwise.

5 "State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities", UN DESA, 2007 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects.

practices. UNIFEM's report on the Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009 indicates that gender disparities are still prevalent in indicators of health, literacy, education, income and employment[6].

D. Prevalence of people with disabilities

People with disability face many barriers to full integration in society and are likely to face an increased risk of social exclusion. This may include being unable to access education, health services, earn a living or participate in decision making. Social exclusion is a major contributor to the level of poverty, which people with disability experience.

In many parts of the world, there is deep-rooted stigmatisation of disability and discriminatory practices against people with disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities suffer the most exclusion, including from mainstream gender equality programmes.

E. HIV/AIDS epidemic

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) *2008 Report on the global AIDS epidemic* indicated that new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths have declined in recent years. This is encouraging and it is good news that the HIV/AIDS epidemic appears to be slowing.

But HIV-related stigma and discrimination severely hamper efforts to effectively address the epidemic. This applies especially to the most high-risk groups – sex workers, injecting drug users and men having sex with men – social groups which are excluded in many countries because they are criminalised for their behaviour.

F. Crises and adjustments

The current financial and economic crisis is creating a human crisis on a global scale[7]. Developing nations, in particular, are facing a sudden convergence of food, fuel and financial crises that will make it more difficult to protect the most vulnerable people. Experts say poorer countries could be hit twice by the crisis. It will be more difficult to get access to funding and exports will fall because the crisis reduces demand. For many developing countries, the crisis will mean slower growth and rising inequality.

G. Civil conflicts and disasters

The series of civil wars, communal and social conflicts the world over is fuelling social exclusion. Deep rifts and destruction of lives and property and social upheavals have arisen from these conflicts.

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6 United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009: Who Accounts to Women?, www.unifem.org/progress/2008/publication.html.

7 World Bank. Rising Food and Fuel Prices: Addressing the Risks to Future Generations, 2008.

The numbers of internally displaced persons have been climbing over the past decade, as conflicts within states have become more prevalent than those between states. More people forcibly displaced from their homes are remaining in their own countries in refugee-like conditions.

Climate refugees are a growing trend in exclusion. In 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that the greatest single impact of climate change could be on human migration - with millions of people displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption[8]. Forced climate migrants fall through the cracks of international refugee and immigration policy—and there is considerable resistance to the idea of expanding the definition of political refugees to incorporate climate 'refugees'.

H. Participation in economic, social, cultural, and political processes

On a positive note, globalization has contributed to the strengthening of people's organisations, including the poor themselves and civil society in general.

Neither democracy nor development can be achieved without effective organisation of people to pursue common interests. The awakening of civil society will foster development efforts.

II. Policy considerations

The commitments made at the 1995 Social Summit presented a key opportunity for policy makers and development planners to embark on a new development path, one that demands a shift to a more people-centred, equitable, community-based and participatory focus. The "new" strategy for sustained development entails incorporating social concerns in economic policies and investments in concrete and measurable terms; it requires generating more tangible opportunities and benefits, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. It further means creating an inclusive socio-cultural milieu and social, economic and political institutions that are open and responsive to the participatory requirements of all the people.

While there has been progress in international commitments the factors outlined in this statement lead to greater social exclusion. This makes the efforts of governments, CSOs and the private sector in meeting the Social Summit commitment of promoting social integration more critical.

As a first principle of action, social policy should act on the structural determinants of income distribution and poverty: education, employment, nutrition, wealth distribution and demography, as well as on their associated gender and ethnic dimensions. These factors are the key to breaking the inter-generational transmission of inequality and exclusion.

8 United Nations University (2005) "As ranks of "Environmental Refugees" swell worldwide, calls grow for better definition, recognition, support", UN Day for Disaster Reduction. 12th October 2005.

A second principle is the rationale that, unless social sector policies and economic and social policies are integrated, any policy will be inadequate for solving the major social and economic problems in the current era of globalisation.

Lack of coordination and integration of social and economic policies can lead not only to excessively high social costs but also to the failure of the economic policies themselves through social conflict, political instability and other social upheavals.

Social integration is a difficult objective to attain. A key component of success is to strengthen policies and programmes to promote self-mobilisation of the poor and disadvantaged groups and their effective participation in community and national affairs.

Governments, private sector and civil society need to work jointly to identify the causes of vulnerability and address social exclusion at the community level. Organisations of civil society are particularly well placed to accomplish this task -- they are ubiquitous.

The private sector is essential in tackling the complex and deeply embedded problems of social exclusion. The private sector is an important link to access to employment. Privatised services have a major impact on people's capacity to improve their quality of life.

In developing and implementing policies and programmes all external and domestic development actors need to accord respect to indigenous knowledge, traditions and coping strategies. Culturally appropriate methods should be developed, taking into account people's language, culture, seasonal movements and related factors. Communities should be granted full access to and benefit from their own community resources.

NGOs should be partners in development. Evolving clear working partnerships between the government and NGO sectors through an on-going coordination mechanism will go a long way towards promoting non-confrontational communication and cooperation between them.